

6. EASTERN GREYLAG GEESE *ANSER ANSER RUBRIROSTRIS* SWINHOE IN GUJARAT

I visited Nav Talao, a large but shallow lake nowhere deeper than 3 to 4 ft, on 4 February, 1986. It is situated at Zainabad, Surendranagar district in Gujarat State. On the edges of the lake, there is a thick covering of *Prosopis juliflora*, and there are small islands here and there in the lake where grass grows. I was happy to see more than 200 Rosy Pelicans about the islands, an indication that there was a scarcity of water in the surrounding country.

As I moved my binoculars from the pelicans to the shallow portions of the lake, I saw some huge duck-like birds, which I could not recognize. When I went nearer, I could see the dark heads and light coloured beaks of these

birds, and thought that they were geese. A reference to the HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, by Salim Ali & S. Dillon Ripley, led me to the conjecture that they were Eastern Greylags.

As good luck would have it, Dr John Constable, Director of the World Wildlife Fund, U.S.A. came to camp that day. I told him about my meeting with these geese, and he offered to visit the lake and confirm their identity.

Reaching the lake we set up the view-scope, and my determination of the birds as Eastern Greylag was confirmed by Dr Constable. There were in all 19 of these geese.

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7. BARHEADED AND GREYLAG GEESE IN GUJARAT

Barheaded and Greylag Geese are comparatively rare in Gujarat. Five birdwatcher friends including myself visited Muli Dam (Dist. Surendranagar) on 14-1-84. We saw 22 Barheaded Geese there on the other side of the lake which had dried up considerably. A majority of these birds were resting and others were moving on the grass-covered undulating wetland. We had a good look at them through a telescope.

On 23-11-84 Rajshri K. Saraghai and I accompanied Dr. Salim Ali for birdwatching at

Nal Sarovar (Dist. Ahmedabad). Rajshri and Dr. Salim Ali were in one boat while I, with a friend was in another. My attention was attracted by a small group of unfamiliar birds resting on a tiny islet. I focussed my binoculars on them and immediately recognized them as Greylag Geese. There were 18 to 20 of them. I at once drew the attention of Rajshri towards those birds. At our boats went nearer, they flew away, but prior to that we had a good look at them. Dr. Salim Ali also saw them and confirmed the identification.

Thereafter Rajshri Sarabhai and I saw 64 Greylag Geese again at Thol Lake (Dist. Mehsana) on 21-12-84.

Again I came across some 20 to 22 Greylag

Geese when I was watching birds on Gobhlaj Lake (Dist. Kheda) on 14-1-86 along with a young birdwatcher from Ahmedabad.

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8. EGG MOVING BY A SPOTBILL DUCK
(*ANAS POECILORHYNCHA*)

On 11 May, 1984, I discovered a nest of a Spotbill duck with a clutch of 11 eggs in one of the *Acacia* planted mounds of Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur. The nest was a bowl-shaped depression on top of the grassy mound, partially concealed by grass fibres at the opening. The depression was lined with soft, dark grey down feathers, presumably that of the parent. The area around the nest site was dry as the waters had almost dried up save for tiny pools here and there.

I kept track of the development of this nest by visiting it at least once in four days. On 1 June, 1984, I was taken aback to discover that eight of the eggs had been shifted to a point at the foot of the mound, about a metre from the original site. The new nest site was also a neat grassy depression, and as earlier, the nest was lined with some soft feathers. On 6 June, I flushed the incubating parent from the new nest as I was approaching the mound. The whole clutch of 10 eggs had been shifted to the new nest site, rendering the old nest empty (earlier one egg had disappeared). The parents, for some unknown reason deserted the nest after 6 June and hatching success was nil.

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It is of interest to note that the bird had shifted the entire clutch, the reason for which is not clear. Oring (1964) reports similar strange and unaccountable incidences of egg moving by three incubating ducks. (two Pintails *Anas acuta* and one mallard *A. platyrhynchos*). On all the occasions he had subjected the nests to considerable disturbance by placing nest traps over them, but he has not been able to arrive at a definite conclusion that the disturbance instigated them to shift the eggs, as, earlier, eggs in numerous nests similarly placed with traps were left intact. Thus, it is unlikely that the minor disturbance created by my visits to the spotbill nest were responsible for the egg moving.

One explanation seems logical. The marshes were rapidly drying up and the original nest site on top of the mound was completely dry with just a few coarse tufts of dry brown grass. The new nest-site at the base of the mound, however, had some amount of moisture left in the form of wet green grass. It is possible that the eggs were moved to the lower site because the area afforded moist and better conditions both for the eggs and the parent.

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